

Interview with Joe Martynec

A: 1926 when I come in this country, I have to work 10 hours a day for five days go buy 100 pound of flour.

Q: I can imagine. When you were at Richmond Park . . . ?

A: This time it was a dollar for wheat that time.

Q: What would a pound of butter cost in the early thirties there when you first . . . ?

A: In thirties a farmer get seven cents for a pound of butter, three cents for a dozen eggs and pigs, and cattle you couldn't sell it, if you had thirty you couldn't sell it.

Q: And if you wanted to buy a pound of sugar or what were they per pound?

A: That I forget.

Q: You forgot eh. Did you smoke even then?

A: Yes I smoke.

Q: You didn't smoke when you were in Czechoslovakia did you?

A: I order from Quebec or some place I saw in the paper, you know. Leaf tobacco.

Q: No - Yes, Leaf tobacco; sure in the packages.

A: Leaf tobacco - Leaves, cut nice and you smoke this.

Q: You had to cut it up yourself?

A: Ya cut nice fine.

Q: Where did you get - you got your papers in Athabasca - your cigarette papers. It would send the papers too.

A: No from a package of brown paper, roll it up .

Q: Oh you didn't use cigarette - when did you finally buy cigarette papers. Maybe later on.

A: When I was some place working, you know making money. A package tobacco was 15 cents.

Q: How much did you pay for the leaves.

A: For the leaves, I forget, I think it was 25 cents a pound.

Q: What kinds of catalogues did you have back then. Did you have - like an Eatons . . .?

A: I saw in somebodies newspaper.

Q: Did you, yourself, get any newspapers, like the Free Press-Winnipeg Free Press.

A: No, I had no papers, no money to get them. I was borrowing from neighbours. Lots of time I went to Martin Hines, it was only three miles, it was German paper.

Q: Where would you buy your clothes?

A: In town.

Q: When you were still out on the farm at Richmond Park, did you ever run into any Indian people or have any of them working for you?

A: I had one friend, he was like friend, he lived in a little shack on kind of the flat in Calling River, right by the river with his old wife, and he's supposed to be at that time, 100 years old. That's what he used to say. Every month he went to town for his pension. He was getting \$25 pension, so he took all his tent and blankets, loaded everthing onto horse and he lead the horse, he don't ride the horse. One time, it was in winter time, he came to mine place and he ask me if he can sleep in the barn, put the horse in the barn. I say well sure. I take your horse in the barn, and I says no, you go in the house. He didn't want to go in the house. I no let you in the barn to sleep. So She make him coffee and lunch, and in the morning cook breakfast and next time, in the fall he come again and he give me half a beer.

Q: For payment, see, because you were so kind to him. You never had any of the Indian people working for you on the farm eh?

A: I had Indians in Paxson, the first did work for me, they dig basement in new house.

Q: How much did you have to pay them a day?

A: Well he had a contract. They had there own horses and scraper, we give them all their meat and eggs and cream and

the package was everything. The wives ??????? and the young, and it was nice to watch them. Always, every morning, they make all that big black smoke. Always hanging shirts in the morning, they hang on the line, and they ask me if they should bring water and everything ?????????? ?????????????????? and we helped them out, very nice people. In the morning she put a fire in the front of the tent and she was trying to fix it there, and when she start building a fire and digging dirt, and she was kind of praying for this.

Q: What was the name of the old fellow that lived on the river, the friend that stayed over night?

A: Joe Burtus?

Q: No, the old Indian.

A: Minahue. I work quite abit ???????? summer time. That was helping me the most. About six, seven summers we were repairing the telegraph line from Deep Creek up to the Calling River up to, close to - I forget, not right to McMurray. Not that far, because there was another line there. So one time in ???????? we had a big raft ???????? you know, big raft ???????? and between ???? we would paddle, they were about sixteen, eighteen feet long. And we load it with six men,???? Cramer, he was always the cook, and a load of spikes and wires and all kinds of things, and boxes and boxes of grub. Everything in boxes, food and everything. One time we stop in Pelican, Pelican Mountains, there was a George Carothers, he had a trading post; one time he had to haul in the mill with a team of moose.

Q: Was that Pelican Rapids or Pelican Mountains?

A: No, that was closer. There was ?????? Pelican Portage, and there was a post office and a store, he was trading with the Indians, George Caruthers was his name. I had a ???? there was so much gas, lights come in from the river ?????? pipes.

Q: There was that old fellow by the name of Newman used to live up there too. Did you ever hear of a Newman?

A: I hear the name.

Q: And he used to have a big garden because he had gas there.

A: There was lots - both sides of the river. Long time they been digging gas; I don't know, may be hundred years. Before me; I don't know. Because they dig and they suppose to ?????? and there was gas, so much gas, the pipes been ?????? steel pipes laying there.

Q: You travelled so much up and down that Athabasca River, did

you ever hear that there was gold in the Athabasca River?

A: Gold? ?????????? Six Mile Island there is Gold.

Q: Did you ever go look for any?

A: No I didn't

Q: You didn't have time did you?

A: No, No

Q: But just think, you may have been a rich man.

A: One time there was one outfit digging that in the ????????. One of the Burtys's boys dig up land right there, right in the river bank. They paid him to dig.

Q: Where did this outfit come from?

A: I don't know.

Q: You don't know?

A: No, ??????????.

Q: When would that have been, when they were digging for gold there?

A: Well it didn't pay.

Q: Yeh, but when were they there?

A: Oh when, oh that was a long time ago.

Q: After you came?

A: ???????? ????????

Q: Oh, soon after you came to Canada Eh?

A: Yeh, Yeh. There was one fellow was washing gold. There was a few miles from ???????? across the ????????, then the trapper he was washing gold, most of the time he was visiting ????????

Q: That would have been in the late thirties, early forties.

A: No, no, no, that would have been close to forty. Because even this ?????????? was washing the gold for him. Eh shovelling, at that time he was paying two dollars a day.

Q: You were still in Richmond Park when they started building roads then hay? When they started building a road north of

the river.

A: Well that was a kind of a little bit better. It was not like it is now.

Q: But there was starting to get a trail hey?

A: A little bit road ????? already. Break it a little bit but there was no gravel. It was narrow, oh narrower than the highway.

Q: Which way would you have traveled, past from Richmond Park, which way did you go? Past my uncle Paul's place, was that the road you would have taken?

A: Yeh.

Q: That would have been the road to Athabasca. Past Gormin's?

A: Under ????? down the hill and up and Gormin. ?????????.

An omission was made here.

Q: So can you tell us anything else? After you've gone through this terrible hard life and you look at life today Mr. Martenyk, you think we are pretty spoiled don't you. We've go too much.

A: Very, Very spoiled. I couldn't, I never thought that people could be so spoiled. Just like mine cows when I was on the farm. When they a little hungry, when you let them out of the barn they eat any kind of grass there was and were satisfied, soon as they fill up they're stomachs they look at the fences, and yet they were good fences, they were breaking the fences ??????. That is the way people are now. The more they got the more they want. They don't care from where they get, they just got to have it, they don't care. You try business, they got to know. Like I here on the ?????? Brouder, he spent five million dollars and he was ?????? they been telling ??????. He says he was working with the men twenty-two weeks. All the jobs ??????????. Now they pay him ?????? nothing to do. You can fire, no matter how bad the man is you can't fire him.

Q: Well do you think it's ever going to change?

A: I tell you, if the - see that's the trouble; because I can tell you a story about the unions. Because in the Old Country I was always in the union myself. They had the union. I was even delegate of the union. Building big factory, build box cars, trains and everything. New buildings. Was a lot of carpenters, I was a foreman - not foreman, delegate for the union. So there was democrates, see like in Czechoslovakia ,then you were in the factory,

the owner of the factory, he had only the right to take ten per cent of the factory, because he have to pay the workers and he have to improve, repair and improve the ?????, ten per cent goes out, and five per cent, he get interest of the money that is in the bank because he don't need the factory if he don't get even interest. Now if we would have tried to get more money, he show you all the books, work a little bit harder. I get mine if you work harder, you work.

Q: So that's what people did, they worked a little bit harder and got a little more.

A: Yeh, but not here.

Q: Not here.

A: In Qebec, you got bigger ?????? then what you know. There was so much trouble with the factory, so they got by how much they make you know, make a deal with the boss, he makes money and they make money. Now you start something, you know one year is alright, next year they go on strike where you are. You put millions to start small business after two, three years they want more and more and you can't get so much. You lose your two million dollars then is better for you to put in - buy government bonds or something.

Q: So what do you like about life today Mr. Martenyk?

A: Now for me, is very good. Now I am happy that I'm in Canada for mine own children. I went through hell for so many years and now I will have a lot easier life then there.

Q: In Czechoslovakia.

A: Yeh, I think I work for mine family.

Q: That's right Mr. Martenyk, your family is better off here.

A: Mine family, keep the work is good for anybody.

Q: So you enjoy television, radio?

A: When I was by myself I read lots of books. All kinds of books.

Q: In Czechoslovakian, Polish or English?

A: English

Q: Where did you learn to read English?

A: I learn English from man who didn't know more than two words.

Q: Who was that?

A: ^{Ryga} ????? I was on the farm there, ????? George Rigger, ?????, he says he knew a few words already there was not ??? nothing. No English, ????? Martin Hines was german, well he says, don't read another newspaper ????? see I buying the newspaper English, he says Athabasca Echo, and he show me see - cow, and he find in the book cow, there was a few words in it, he was looking everything in the book.

Q: In a Dictionary?

A: No, no in the newspaper. He had no money to buy Dictionary. (he would find a picture of a cow - comment from Mr. Martenyk's daughter). Then one time when we build a school, well George, Rod and me and Molly, from mine country too, Shalapay ????? and ????? and Dave, six or seven, we were ????? asked ????? could make evenings class and she says ok. Two dollar a month from us. I don't know how many classes, so one day we come home and there's ????? with shotgun and in three, four days we are really coming ????? In the three or four evenings I got lots of awards. Oh yeh.

Q: Do you still read?

A: English?

Q: Yes, do still read a little bit now?

A: English?

Q: Yes.

A: If I could talk so fast as I could read, I couldn't talk so fast I could read.

Q: Do you read the Edmonton Journal?

A: All kinds of papers. (he says he can't talk as fast as he can read - daughter). I got all kinds of western books.

Q: You like western stories ah?

A: In Vegreville I was taking the geographic. That's a good books. Have you never seen?

Q: Yes I've seen the National Geographics. They are very good books.

A: I got a couple here I can show you.

Q: Oh you've got the National Geographics.

A: I want to show you the one that's supposed to be over in

Russia.

Q: Do you like to watch T.V. Mr. Martenyk?

A: Yes, always.

Q: Do you watch Gretzky? Do you watch Gretzky play hockey?

A: That one I like the best, but now he is sick.

Q: He is hurt now yes, he'll be back playing soon I think. What were you looking for, something about Czechoslovakia?

A: No, something about Russia. I had one book.

Q: Did you see on T.V. when Gorbachev (check the spelling) came to the United States?

A: Yeh.

Q: What do you think of Gorbachev?

A: He's a great man.

Q: Do you think he's going to make things better in Russia?

A: In Russia is a lot better then in the States.

Q: You think so?

A: Oh yeh, in the States is in big trouble. Because too much ????? over three trillion. So that's why those - what do you call it - everything went down, boom.

Q: Oh the Stocks and Bonds. I guess they've got to get Regan out of there hey. So you have a story and some pictures of Russia hey?

A: There is one many ????? should be older. This was a few years ago. Oldest in the world.

Q: A Russian man?

A: A Russian, yeh.

Q: You weren't ever in Russia yourself hey?

A: No

Q: Have you traveled much Mr. Martenyk? Did you go back to Czechoslovakia ever?

A: No, never.

Q: Have you got relatives back there?

A: Oh I had five sisters and brothers I don't know if they're living.

Q: Did you not ever want to go back?

A: No I tell you, They were lot better off. I was suppose to be a farmer here in Canada and I was the poorest man.

Q: Do you write to them?

A: I had - they want a picture, I had no clothes, decent clothes to put on the children. Five sisters everyone had there own boy dressed up so nice.

Q: Do you write your family Mr. Martenyk?

A: No more. They die a long time ago.

Q: Do you remember some dances at Richmond Park?

A: Wedding was not so much fun, it was when there was a surprise party. One time, in the winter time, cause there was winter in those days. Not like this. They came big ???? boys from Prosperity, they come across the river, they were in Richmond Park. They came to John Byrtus, they start pounding on the barn you know, noise ?????, and he wouldn't let them in. So they came to mine place. I know ????? I said we have the old house, only two rooms, two children, wife says how we can let them unless we take them in the house warm up, get warm and they can go. Alright, I went out and I says come in; and they were so happy that they come in they brought coffee, sandwiches and they don't know what the heck, they bring moonshine and everything. I clean out one room, put in one corner, one had accordion, you know, them buggers, they make such a big ?????, they had everything.

Q: Music and everything. How many people would have come?

A: Maybe eight. We have one hell of a time. They were so happy.

Q: Did they dance?

A: Sure.

Q: Do you remember any weddings?

A: No. (yes dad you remember Charlie Gora's wedding-daughter). Oh yes, dis a remember, I damn near died. I was ????? drunk in sixty-two years ?????, but that time was a

little too much.

Q: Where was the wedding, at Richmond Park?

A: Yes, in the hall.

Q: In the hall. When was that hall built? do you remember maybe?

A: We build the hall, oh that was in the thirties.

Q: So was it a big wedding? How many people?

A: I don't know, maybe thiry people.

Q: That's quite a few, just the neighbours. Was she married in a white dress?

A: Oh yeh. There is one thing I'm going to tell you that for me was interesting. It might be for a lot of people. ?????????? before Christmas, six years a little bit older, going to school ?????????? was very continue crying, they brought the Ukranian cloths and everything, and so some of them, Dave Shalapay and John and some of them with this cothes ?????????? great singers. So they in the hall, they make a concert, Charlie Pix came and Mayor of town with his wife.

Q: Who was the mayor then?

A: I just forget. They come there and one brought big box of oranges for the children and another for the children, and the stage was the children in Ukranian clothes ?????????? and one after the other in English, first year in Canada, never here in the School, poems and everything in English and sing O'Canada. You - the old lady was crying. Children ?????????? ?????????? it was so nice. It was touching, to them it was very touching.

Q: But they used to have a lot of concerts every Christmas didn't they.

A: Oh yes. Big. A few times through the year - concerts. Fifteen cents, they charged fifteen cents. Because they had to buy everything.

Q: They used to have dances, just the community.

A: Picnic, dances, oh dances in the school. There was, Jake Geiselson he took the accordion and his sister; guitar and women they make chicken, sandwiches, all kinds of sandwiches, one bootlegger, he brought beer bottles full for twenty-five cents, you know, for a bottle.